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Discourses of Resilience in the US Alt-Right

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Abstract

The New Right movements known as the American Alt-Right regularly appeal to resilience and resistance. In this research we examine whether and how they include resilience thinking in their discourses. We analyse Alt-Right discourses on indigeneity, frequently enunciated as the survival of race, on social norms, with a focus on gender, as well as on power and democracy to uncover the role played by resilience thinking. It is found that an illiberal 'reactionary resilience' is clearly manifest and linked to 1930s as well as newer ideas of identity, nature and politics. It plays an unlikely and important role in coagulating Alt-Right ideas of identity, survival and struggle in particular. Further, resilience as an assumption linked to nature as well as an operational concept, plays key roles in framing the publicly acceptable face of Alt-Right arguments and as a strategic and personal ethos in resisting social and political change.

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Keywords

Resilience, Alt-Right, New Right, nationalism

Introduction

Illiberal politics are on the rise worldwide. Scholarly and public attention has focussed on the rising confidence amongst actors who explicitly see themselves as significantly to the right of already established right wing political parties, and define their policy agenda as resistance to 'globalist values', particularly identity and gender equality, migration and free trade (Bokhari & Yiannopoulos, 2016). A cursory look at the public interventions of these actors reveals that resistance and the resilience necessary to enact it are key themes. Though resilience is commonly identified as a progressive or Liberal mode of politics, its role in Alt-Right discourse –as a means to counter Liberalism– reveals that it can also play an important role in illiberal politics. Indeed, resilience might even act as a unifying factor in their self-definition as politically resilient patriots. In a suggestive example, Alex Jones, an influential radio commentator and defender of gun rights, recommends 'preparedness' for his listeners and frequently reminds them that 'you are the resistance!' (Infowars, n.d.).

In this article we provide an analytical and conceptual account of how one of the key –if disaggregated– anti-globalist actors, the Alt-Right, incorporates forms of resilience thought. These movements are not new; reactionary political traditions clearly have deep roots in all the societies in which they are occurring and have been rising in profile for several decades. There is a sense of surprise, however, that these political movements seem to be gaining wide support. This has been most marked in the election of Donald Trump, whose victory is seen to have been significantly assisted by online actors who, under the neologism ‘Alt-Right’, distinguish themselves from mainstream conservatism –and detoxify the ‘far-right’ brand (Love, 2017; Mudde, 2017). Whilst we are sensitive to the normative project of legitimisation implicit to the term ‘Alt-right’, it remains the defining term of reference here because it is the term by which these actors increasingly define themselves, and because it captures the manner in which these political movements have changed as they have increasingly moved online.

Whilst research has sought to unpick root causes, for example linking the popular appeal of these actors to the economic side-effects of globalisation, a critical research question with respect to these wider trends, and for groups located in the United States in particular is the degree to which there is a clear and cohesive intellectual and political project present in these movements. There is significant variety in ‘alt right’ formations across spaces, countries and discursive levels in the west, Europe and America, and in non-western locations, from Russia to East Asia. There are, however, some clear common political logics or sensibilities with diagrammatic resonances between these manifestations. The new right is a contested assemblage of ideas linked together by common themes and assumptions. We are dealing with a range of political actors including theorists, violent groups and grassroots movements united by the aforementioned political logics. These are expressed in coherent and powerful discourses. Key among them is resilience in the face of change in identity, culture and values. Given these actors appear to be rising in their electoral influence, professing ideas that may, as some have argued, present a significant challenge to a range of currently settled norms, identifying these wider themes constitutes a critical research objective. Better identifying these themes will allow us to explore why these ideas have appeal today, but also, how they resonate with the common sense established by mainstream trends in social and intellectual life.

The United States provides for a well contained and influential case study of the highly diverse constellation of reactionary intellectual and political movements worldwide. It provides the opportunity to identify common trends that cross diverse elements and are discursively consistent across media, from 4Chan to White Power music. Also notable in this context is William Connolly’s (2005) analysis of the confluence of religious identity politics and capitalism in the United States in particular. His account of how particular identities attached to evangelical Christianity in the US constructed a resonant relationship with corporate interests offers a clear indication of the importance of acknowledging the local and historical contingency of any nationalist assemblage. The first aim of this article is to contribute to the emerging body of research which seeks to unpack the discourses and intellectual genealogies of the US Alt-Right (Nagle, 2017; Neiwert, 2017).

Our approach relies on discourse analysis. By dismantling and exploring the dynamics of Alt-Right discursive articulations, we retrieve its logic and mechanisms. Whilst our normative agenda is critical, we do not here engage in an ethical critique of these discourses. Rather, our aim is to map their internal logic and principles of coherence so that areas of cross-fertilisation and distinctiveness can be better understood. More specifically, we seek to unpack the role that ‘resilience thinking’ plays in the discourses of actors on the Alt Right in the US context. In the first section, we outline Resilience thought and explain why exploring discourses of resilience amongst reactionary actors has analytical value. We argue that reactionary political thought has always contained elements suggestive of resilience thinking, but that has been a diffusion of Resilience into core areas of Alt-right concern – race, identity, diversity and persistence.

In the subsequent three sections, we explore how resilience can be seen to operate within reactionary discourses on the Alt-Right in America in relation to identity, gender and culture before, in the final section, elaborating an understanding of these surprising politics of resilience. We find that the Alt-Right discourse implicitly incorporates a distinct mechanism of community and individual resistance. It firstly posits resilience as access to the means, conditions and norms necessary for (an eventual) resistance –their take on gun ownership is an excellent example (see *Infowars* for example). Secondly, resilience is framed as a personal struggle to retain one’s ideas in the face of what they perceive as dominant liberal orthodoxy. This entails informational resilience to ‘fake news’ and, crucially, epistemological resilience to all Liberal interpretations of politics, the economy and social norms, which is framed as a vital *precondition* to eventually being able to resist and overthrow Liberalism.

A reactionary resilience?

‘a fog descended over the entire nation’ (*Infowars*, n.d.).

Resilience is widely seen as a value which refers to whether an object, ecology, actor, or community has or may develop the capacity to manage the effects of external pressures; economic, ecological, social, technological and cognitive (Zebrowski, 2015). Resilience is treated here as a discourse rather than an objective scientific function, which has come to be adopted as a term of art by various actors in multiple fields of scientific and social practice. The concept of resilience has a strong or developing presence across diverse fields, from Climate Science to Counter-Terrorism. Across these varied research areas, resilience has become a predominant ‘buzzword’ for planners, scholars, bureaucrats and policy makers. It has also been seen as a prized personal characteristic.

Whilst resilience as a term has diverse roles across these different fields, it is worth recognising that the term is internally contested. The discourse of resilience, or ‘resilience thinking’ folds in a variety of a concepts and correlate values including adaptability, transformation, resistance, evolution, persistence, which may be assembled in different ways. The capacity to sustain or enhance the capacity of the local or indigenous to deal with or bounce back in the face of global environmental, technological, social or political stresses, has been seen to potentially preclude any and all transformative politics. For this reason, resilience thinking has been critiqued as concerned only with the development of ‘conducts

or capabilities to cope with or withstand powerful forces outside our control' (Vrasti & Michelsen, 2017). There have also, however, been various cases made for the transformative potentiality of resilience thinking in different contexts (Pelling, 2010). These debates go back to the original formulations of socio-ecological resilience by authors like Holling (1973).

Across these debates, critical discourses on resilience suggest that it is inherently entangled with problematic politics. A contrast may be drawn between authors arguing that Resilience is best understood as discourse that has an 'intuitive fit' with (neo)Liberalism, and those who suggest it moves beyond Liberalism (Chandler, 2014a). Arguments in this vein posit that Resilience can (but does not necessarily) operate as a discursive vessel for contemporary power relations, inasmuch as it broadly aligns with Hayekian free market, and an associated decentralized governmentality. The forms and modalities of administration, politics and freedom which are already predominant in developed Liberal Societies have found, in Resilience thinking, a useful toolbox for development (Joseph, 2013). The alternative perspective has been that the discourse of resilience is better understood as building upon, but also projecting beyond forms of Liberal governance (Chandler, 2014b). One area of this debate concerns the manner in which Resilience thinking is framed as concerning the local, indigenous, historically embedded knowledge that underpins effective responses to crises, or sustainable life in an environment. Advocating for resilience may thus be read as demonstrative of the capture of indigenous rights movements by Neoliberalism (See Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen in this special issue), or as showing how new onto-political logics are transforming governance approaches, whether to peacebuilding or risk analysis (Chandler, 2018).

Either way, current debates broadly agree that it is important to define the politics of resilience in relationship to temporalities of Liberal governance. The presumption is that excavating the discourse of resilience functions to identify a set of political practices. Whilst we are concerned with the politics of resilience, and it is clear that Liberal values have salience in this context, we do not presume that the politics of resilience is, or is likely to be, identifiable with this singular set of power relations. The diversity of fields in which resilience thinking finds functionalities seems likely to be open to significant variance in political utilities.

Our starting methodological assumption is genealogical: that the history of a thing, whether that thing is a ritual, practice, concept or discursive assemblage, is formed by its capture and mobilisation by actors and powers external to it. Concepts, like resilience, do not have inherent politics, but are mobilized politically by specific actors for specific functions in specific contexts, though some actors are more able to do this in certain contexts. The negotiation between persistence and change, to which resilience thinking relates, clearly touches upon all elements of politics and various articulations of the political. Resilience, like all discursive objects, is open to repurposing. The proliferation of 'Resilience' as a term of art suggests the possibility that 'resilient thinking' must inevitably seep into new political spaces, with new line of significance. It stands to reason that the pervasiveness of resilience thinking will find expression in varied political movements.

Given the widespread assumption that Resilience is somehow expressive of trends associated with the historicity of Liberalism (Neo or Post), to test whether such seepage is occurring, we seek out non-Liberal movements and examine their discursive products for the markers of resilience thinking. The presence of resilience thinking within expressly non-Liberal or illiberal discourses, movements or actors would, of course, support a hypothesis that concepts like resilience do not have a natural politics, they are deployed and redeployed by actors in the context of historically specific power relations. It would support the general sense that resilience thinking as a conceptual tool box implies varied political potentialities and may support or be mobilised to support varied political agendas.

The key relevant conceptual distinction concerns the contrast between *acquiescence* to the (ecological, economic, social, political) constraints of the present, an attempt to *transform* or over-throw those constraints through the creation of a new conditions, or categorical resistance to conditions in the present in pursuit of a *return* to a previous condition of stability. The politics of resilience are often conceptualised as a matter of political acquiescence, though some attempts have been made to incorporate transformation or even revolution into the uses of term (Michelsen, 2017; Pelling, 2010). All concepts, rituals, practices or sensibilities are tracked by an ambulant genealogy. In any genealogy, what defines the passage of a thing through history are the disjunctions between the discrete moments where that thing (concept, practice, ritual, idea) is adopted and mobilized by a new power and set to new tasks. Asking if resilience plays a role in reactionary movements committed expressly to unpicking or reversing Liberalism will provide an indication as to how this is taking place.

The pedigree of anti-modern resilience is key. The 'traditionalist' writings of Fascist theorist Giulio Evola have in recent years been identified as a key inspiration and source by a wide range of figures on the US right including Richard Spencer (founder AlternativeRight.com), Steven Bannon (previous editor of Breitbart), David Duke (previously Grand Dragon of the Klu Klux Klan) and Jared Tylor (founder of American Renaissance, a long standing online platform advocating for 'Race Realism'). Evola (1934) identified political 'reaction' as 'counter-revolutionary' thought set against the legacy of the French Revolution and committed to the revolt against modernity in name of cultural tradition. All traditionalist accounts view history as a regression from a prior golden age of mythic purity (Burnham, 1985; Spengler, 1918). Evola, with the range of modern figures following him, ascribed the degenerative tendency to the logic of modernity itself, in a manner not entirely dissonant with the Frankfurt School pessimists. Evola's (2001) objective was to 'see if there still exist men capable of saying no' to the consequences of the French Revolution. His metaphysics of the sacred distinguished him from other reactionaries like Guénon (1994), while the desire to sustain the possibility of some 'dynamic return to first principles' distinguished both from Futurists, who embraced modernist progress (Furlong, 2011, p. 55). The epochal task is to mediate between 'contingent and universal', 'the principles of tradition and changing historical circumstances'. The reactionary does not 'cling to the past for its own sake or for the sake of some material privileges enjoyed by a specific group. It is rather to give continuity to the principles of which the institutions, forms and cultures are contingent expressions' (Evola, 1934; Furlong, 2011, p. 19).

The politics of resisting modernity have, however, been heavily reframed. As explained by Alain De Benoist, the father of the French Nouvelle Droite, and a key influence on the US Alt right: 'modernity will not be transcended by returning to the past, but by means of certain premodern values in a decisively postmodern dimension' (de Benoist & Champetier, 1999). Reactionary traditionalism, inasmuch as it roots its politics in a vision of salvation through ensuring the persistence of inherited attributes and values, would seem to be open to construal using the tools of resilience thinking. Alt-Right discursive influencers like Alex Jones, for example, frame about the right to bear arms as a norm to be protected against liberal encroachment. Resilience to gun control norms is separate from –and a key condition for– the right and capability for armed resistance. For this reason, we investigate whether logics of resilience are actually visible in the discourses of the contemporary alt-right.

There are intuitive grounds to hypothesise the potential for a reactionary political reading of resilience. Inasmuch as many uses of resilience thinking fetishize the historically and culturally rooted, the local, or the indigenous, resilience appears to have some resonance with the tradition of counter-revolutionary historicism. Resilience thinking is certainly not logically opposed to non-Liberal or illiberal problematizations of modernity. Resilience, because it is adaptive to, is always *reactive to*, the environment, so as to ensure some essential and valued quality is maintained. Resilience thinking might thus be identified with an *a priori* disposition of resistance toward progressive change or ontological transformation. Suggestive examples from the Alt-Right would include the role of nativism in resisting gradual change such as economic globalisation and gender equality. In this regard, resilience thinking can imply a 'salvation politics of tradition' set against Kantian or Hegelian progressive, or revolutionary philosophies of history. In this sense, resilience thinking has intuitive resonances with traditionalist and reactionary critiques of modernity and modernist historiography, such as that espoused by Alexander Dugin (2014) in Russia, explicitly using the language of resilience, which impute that modernization includes a militant transgression of the local, effecting variants of cultural death through the corruption of tradition and de-sacralisation, and which raise the question of what might be saved from the ruins of the present and how 'to give conservatism some consistency and political resilience'.

There are further reasons why we might hypothesize the likelihood of finding traces of resilience thinking amongst the discourses of the US Alt-Right. The US Alt Right has been recognized to be internally highly diverse. Folding together white ethno-nationalists, Libertarians, and cultural reactionaries concerned with, for example, changing gender roles, the alt-right contains strands which are closely allied with the anti-statist values of individual responsibility, innovation, and resilient autonomy that underpin Hayekian Neoliberalism, as well as strands which are virulently opposed to Liberal democratic and market ideology. In these latter strands, the value assigned to collective persistence and inherently resilient indigenous traits is logically linked to racist or highly gendered repurposing. In sum, we suggest that there are spaces in the Alt-right in which discourses concerning resilience are shared and distributed, denoting instances when 'resilience thinking' seeps into reactionary fora.

Analysing Alt-right discourse from a resilience perspective firstly reveals the political ambiguities of resilience thinking. In particular, it challenges the intuitive fit with Liberalism.

Secondly, it uncovers the changing rationalities of Alt-right politics and, crucially, their interpolation with the Liberal values they seek to challenge. In the following sections, we analyse discourses reflective of 'resilience thinking' and elaborate the conceptual framework of Reactionary Resilience. As we will show, resilience thinking plays out at both the individual and collective level in Alt Right discourse. We begin by examining correspondences between the ways resilience is conceptualised as a positive value in indigeneity studies, and the way White Nationalists and self-describing defenders of European Ethnic identity frame their intellectual and political projects. We find that positions on the alt-right explicitly suggest a reiteration of more widespread discourses of positive resilient indigeneity. We then turn to the Alt-Right critique of cultural Liberalism in the US, particularly around gender and political activity, which shares common themes with literature on personal resilience. Finally, we turn to the alt-right critique of democracy, and note that whilst internally diverse, alt-right discourses on political change are also suggestively inflected with resilience thinking.

Resilience in Alt-right discourses of indigeneity

'mankind as such does not exist' (de Benoist & Champetier, 1999).

We are not looking at a simple revival of 1930s ideology. Common rhetorical comparisons of the Alt Right to National Socialism or Fascism point to the presence of social hatred, racism, or xenophobia therein (Rosenfeld, 2017). There are, of course, as noted above, relevant Traditionalist and Reactionary discourses that find their origins in the 1920s-30s, two of which, on modernity and race, we explore here. However, the rhetorical move in making these associations can obscure how the US Alt Right addresses the very different domestic politics and international relations of the 2010s. Their solutions are, even when nostalgic of the 1930s, different and which cannot be simply reduced to the echoes of the past. Building on the French Nouvelle Droite, who 'adapted the theories of Antonio Gramsci that political change follows cultural and social change', the Alt Right expressly sees politics as 'downstream from culture'. This quote is attributed to Andrew Breitbart, the founder of *Breitbart.com*, a website which is viewed as a principle mainstream platform for Alt-Right discourse (Nagle, 2017, p. 40). Issues of race-relations and racism, are a common implicit or explicit concern on the Alt Right as are related concerns relating to ethnic and cultural distinctiveness and uncontrolled immigration which were mainstreamed in Samuel Huntington's, *Who are We?* (2005). This is reflected in Breitbart, longstanding platforms such as *American Renaissance*, and more explicit White Nationalist publications such as *Alt-Right.com* and *Stormfront.com*.

Alt-Right resilience appears as a trope and as a problematic. At root of all these discourses is an explicitly or tangentially rejection of the modernist 'superstition-belief' in a subjective 'tabula rasa' by which subjects are viewed as wholly constituted by, and thus entirely adaptive to, their lived environment. First articulated by the Nouvelle Droite, as De Benoist put it: 'Man is not born like a blank page. Every single individual bears the general characteristics of the species, to which are added specific hereditary predispositions to certain particular aptitudes and modes of behaviour' (de Benoist & Champetier, 1999). This is the assumption underpinning what Alt Right discourse seeks to sanitize as 'Race Realism'

(See “What Is Race Realism?,” 2018).

The core argument is that American culture is predicated on inherited qualities which are indissociable from white ethnic origin (“About Us - American Renaissance,” n.d.; Huntington, 2005). Tribalism is the term adopted by Jared Taylor, along with broader strands of White Nationalist thought, to articulate the argument that a disposition toward anti-miscegenation is natural or genetic. White Supremacy was, he argues, central to the belief systems of most of the major political figures in the founding narrative of America, including Jefferson, Madison, Lincoln, Johnson, Garfield, Taft, Wilson, Harding, Truman and Eisenhower. He claims a range of leading American literary figures too, from Whitman to London, claiming that ‘there is essentially no limit to the racist quotations one could unearth from prominent Americans of the past, but views that are considered unacceptable by today’s standards were so widespread that virtually anyone who said anything about race reflected those views.’ His (1999) argument is that the hegemonic cultural presumption has now become that:

Whites are to pretend that race is meaningless. They have no legitimate group aspirations. Racial diversity is a good thing if it comes at the expense of whites. Slavery is a crime for which we — and only we — must be forever guilty... We have no claim to this land... Whites are a uniquely wicked race, and the sooner we are shoved aside by virtuous non-whites the better.

The key discursive mechanic links white survival to culture. Specifically, fear that Whites will become the minority in the progression of this ‘racial revolution’, in which cultural change advances white extinction. Further, associating purity to survival, Taylor (1999) writes: ‘What do we do? Just toss the whole country into a blender and do away with race entirely. Of course, this really means doing away with whites.’ The argument of these self-described ‘race realists’ like Taylor is that race exists as a referent of identity and culture and must be sustained against miscegenation.

This is a reframing of an old pseudo-scientific theory (Gentile & Mussolini, 1932). In this biologically-grounded frame, race determines identity categories, which in turn determine cultural, social and ethical norms and attributes. Races are ultimately established as Darwinian species struggling for survival. This biological-cultural-ethical discursive link was the work of Giulio Evola and the second major conceptualisation developed on the basis of 1920-30s thought. Drawing on the 19th C geopolitical tradition of Kjéllén, Ratzel, and Haushofer that treated nations as Darwinian races (Ratzel, 1897; Tunander, 2001, 2005; Wolkersdorfer, 1999), Evola framed race as determinant of civilization, history, ethics and politics. Power, in his *dottrina della razza*, could be enacted by developing ‘racial and spiritual consciousness’ that activates ‘the heroic spirit’. Enacting this precept, Evola insisted in Latinising his name to ‘Julius’ Evola. Race was the immanent source of ‘the innate qualities of race, expressed in character, honourable sentiment, courage, loyalty and inner attitude to the world and life’, and in the same move, the individual is eliminated as a political referent, as the ‘pretence’ of the individual is but ‘sabotage’, a ‘subversion,’ of ‘national and racial sentiment’, which emerges as ‘a question of life or death for the entire European civilisation’(Evola, 1941). In Evola’s (1942) pseudo-science ‘race is not only a physical reality, but also an inner spiritual one’.

The Evolan biological-cultural-ethical discursive link is vital. It allows Alt-Right ideas to conclude that 'mankind as such does not exist' 'as a scientific category' and to enlist stereotypes and tropes as scientific proof of this logic (de Benoist & Champetier, 1999). Taylor and the indigeneity-defending Alt-Right argue that these inevitable struggles endanger whites because modern politics does not allow them the means for resilience. Whilst claiming to kick back against a changing common sense, in arguing that racial origin is part of cultural formation, the alt-right also makes an explicit appeal to logics which they see as *held in common* with wider debates around indigenous cultures under threat of extinction. As noted by Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen in this special issue, it is a common assumption that 'to be indigenous is to be resilient' (Rotarangi & Russell, 2009). Resilience thinking is a discourse increasingly concerned with promoting indigenous knowledge to enhance sustainable living. Resilience is deployed to name strategies that harness innate sources of adaptability. Policy as well as postcolonial and decolonial literatures have occasionally sustained that indigenous resilience can change the exterior conditions that inflict communities, an approach critiqued by Keck and Sakdapolrak (2013) for trapping indigenous communities in an adaptive passivity.

Alt Right discourse Both explicitly and implicitly resonates both arguments. The innate qualities of the white European-America are framed as in need of defence against dissolution or corruption by cultural and biological mixture. The argument, held in common with Critical Resilience literatures, is that the ethno-racially defined community cannot be simply relied upon to persist in the face of external pressures. Its resilience is limited and must be sustained against 'colonization' by other ethnicities and cultures. This action explicitly requires unity between factions (like the 2017 Charlottesville 'Unite the Right' protest) articulated as expressive of the 'mission and purpose of the Alt-Right, and the resilience of our men and our ideas' (Ahab, 2018).

Resilience is an essential part of Alt-Right arguments for identity segregation. Whilst assuming 'the alt right has benefited from diversity discourses,' is an overstatement (See Carrillo Arciniega, 2017), they do explicitly adopt its discursive logic, and the actual content of societal resilience debates to frame their arguments (Law, 2017). This underpins 'promotions of a racial threat that is strictly comparable to that facing indigenous peoples, universally, and depicting whites as 'natives' cruelly deprived of equal protection against extinction' (Land, 2012). Rather than treating biocultural diversity as a 'burden' to be reduced, indigenous 'diversity is to be welcomed, and should be maintained and cultivated', which requires maintenance and segregation, not integration (de Benoist & Champetier, 1999). This kind of reactionary argument *for* indigeneity is architectural to white nationalist discourse, grounding the refusal to ignore race. The right to preserve indigenous particularity is claimed as already extended to other indigenous identity groupings. As argued by Milo Yiannopoulos who, prior to a public fall from grace, was a leading advocate for the Alt-right on Breitbart, this requires that 'ethno-cultural identity [...] should be acknowledged and recognized in the public sphere'. The move to incorporate white identities into arguments for indigeneity is grounded on the 'natural conservatism [by which any group is] inclined to prioritise the interests of their tribe', which results in the claim that 'separation is necessary for distinctiveness' (Bokhari & Yiannopoulos, 2016).

It could be argued Alt-Right discourses of segregation depend on ideas of resilience. Its inclusion in a survivalist frame is the key development when compared with 1930s racial theory. Where Evola advocated enacting race's own identity power –anywhere in the world, from Milan to Abyssinia–the Alt-Right grounds its logic in resilience from migration. Their anti-migrant discourse, as espoused by Richard Spencer for example, only makes sense in light of the discourse of fragility or weak racial resilience articulated as the risk of 'white genocide' and the fragility of pure 'whiteness'. Breitbart's frequent appeals to the French novel *The Camp of the Saints* are expressive of this drive to foster conditions for racial survival (Goode, 2015). For Bannon, resistance to migration is rooted on maintaining integral qualities of ethnic identity and associated values.

The race politics of the Alt-Right are inscribed within a project for the promotion of indigenous resilience in the face of its extant vulnerability. As Nick Land notes in *The Dark Enlightenment* (2012), widely cited as one of the intellectual underpinnings of the Alt Right (Sandifer & Graham, 2018), the alarmism of the discourse of fostering a 'resilient whiteness' emphasises that

the prospective annihilation of the white race is attributed to its own systematic vulnerability, whether due to characteristic cultural traits (excessive altruism, susceptibility to moral manipulation, excessive hospitality, trust, universal reciprocity, guilt, or individualistic disdain for group identity), or more immediate biological factors (recessive genes supporting fragile Aryan phenotypes).

In this logic, the addition of norms to biological vulnerability leads to a survivalist need to promote resilience at the expense of 'excessive altruism'. By appealing to wider discourses around indigeneity to justify their own arguments, the Alt-Right adopts forms of common sense discourse within Liberalism to construct arguments for identity segregation and reversal of 'universal reciprocity'. This process of adoption indicates the slippage of discursive modes into quite distinct political contexts, as we find an assemblage of ideas, some of liberal origin, that have been redeployed against liberalism. At the very least, the discourse of indigenous resilience is clearly revealed here as highly politically ambivalent in its connotations.

Alt-right critique of cultural Liberalism and the means of resilience

'you are the resistance!' (Infowars, n.d.).

A too rapidly changing cultural common sense is a central trope in Alt-Right discourse. It is famed as part of a wider critique of cultural Liberalism as a hegemonic ideology that needs natural and operationalised resilience and resistance.¹ As Nagle (2017) explores, the central discursive tropes on Alt-Right discourse online involve an attack on 'Social Justice Warriors' (Nash, 2017). The core claim is that a range of Liberal presuppositions associated with race and gender are indicative of a form of cognitive oppression, an assault on freedom of conscience and of thought. The Alt Right combats this cognitive oppression through

¹ The account of cultural Liberalism as a hegemonic ideology is particularly articulated as 'The Cathedral' by Curtis Yarvin who, writing under the pen-name Mobius Moldbug, has been widely referenced as a key thinker in the Alt-Right.

intentionally scandalous speech acts that, in their account, disturb and restructure the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable thought. The US context is critical here, as legal protections for free speech and religion are mobilised to establish credibility or reasonableness.

Two crucial discursive structures and their appeal can be read through resilience thinking. The first builds upon the indigenous resilience examined above to argue that Liberal Political Correctness mitigates against the ethnic and cultural needs of indigenous 'white' America, and so underwrites their fragility. The second, however, unlike 1930s *razzismo*, bears upon the individual rather than the collective in framing the challenge to hegemonic cultural Liberalism as a personal vocation and burden. In emphasising the travails of 'taking the red pill' and breaking with the cultural common sense, the Alt-Right adopts an ethos resonant of values attached to personal resilience in the very Liberal discourses they seek to challenge.

This is particularly clear with respect to gender and family. As Nagle points out, the Alt-Right includes various anti-feminist and chauvinist intellectual communities, each of which seeks to frame itself as speaking for a previously established common sense, which has been eroded by cultural Liberalism. These strands of the online 'manosphere' are united by a loathing of what is termed 'feminazi' 'gender ideology'. This construct refers to the broadly accepted presumption, established over several decades of research, that gender identity and biological sex are not directly correlated, and that gender identity is rather defined and orientated by wider patterns of behaviour and diffuse societal structures. This research tradition has emphasised the personally oppressive consequences of presuming that sex is determinant of gender, in maintaining inequalities from work-places to domestic life, and in constituting homosexuality or trans identity as abnormal and/or unnatural. In this context, many gender studies authors and activists have also argued for increased sensitivity to the vulnerability, or low resilience, of these actors, to be enshrined in law. The Alt-Right reads these efforts as demonstrative of the hegemonic power of cultural Liberalism engaged in an assault on, firstly, human nature and, secondly, freedom of expression.

Liberal 'gender ideology' is accused of perverting human nature, a shift to be resisted in a number of ways. The first step is, of course, taking the 'red pill': realising the perversion of 'biological nature' ideas common to all Alt-Right thought (de Benoist & Champetier, 1999). The logic is that cultural Liberalism has upended biologically-produced cultural norms crucial for survival by giving women unnatural roles. This discourse is grounded on the same logic as race, where a claim on biology determines culture and norms. The 'Red Pill' subreddit features this idea as a core assumption, explaining how 'gender ideology' by betraying nature creates economic problems, leads to 'misandry' (man-hating), the loneliness of the 'incels' (involuntary celibates), and destroys masculine dignity ("r/TheRedPill," n.d.). The 'manosphere' has a number of solutions to this 'degeneracy' including legalising rape to make women return to proper behaviour (Roosh, 2015), ending masturbation and worshipping housewives ("Proud Boy Magazine," n.d.), reverting society to tribes of warrior men relying on masturbation, 'androphilia' or prostitution for sexual fulfilment (Donovan, 2012), deceiving women into sexual encounters (Roosh V, n.d.), and, for the more conceptually sophisticated, an all-out war on 'misandry' and particularly feminism and gender equality ("A Voice for Men," n.d.). Though bewilderingly varied, the 'manosphere' agrees that the first step is to resist feminism and develop structures resilient to it.

Elliot Rodger's 2014 attack at the University of California is a vital discursive case study due to the discourses and responses that framed it. This 22-year old student killed young women in his university 'because the females of the human species were incapable of seeing the value in me' –specifically because they had the freedom to choose whether to sleep with him– in what he termed 'the Day of Retribution' (Rodgers, 2014). Beyond the attack and Rodger's own claims, the Red Pill subreddit contains references to him as the 'Perfect Gentleman', his actions as the beginning of the 'Incel Rebellion' bound up in apocalyptic masculine resilient hero discourses. Rodgers and his supporters are extreme even by Alt-Right standards, but the discursive mechanism by which they seek to develop resilience against liberal gender equality norms is shared by the vast majority of the Alt-Right (see for example Bokhari & Yiannopoulos, 2016; Nagle, 2017; Neiwert, 2017). The resistance of the 'incels' against women's free choice of partners exemplifies the discourse that Feminism attacks men, nature, family and humanity and, crucially, that the freedom to speak against it is ever more curtailed.

Free speech emerges as the central site of resilience. The Alt right claims that certain ideas about the benefits of a family being heteronormative become crimes if their expression is framed as an aggression in law. This argument can be seen clearly articulated in the online lectures and writings of Canadian psychologist, Jordan Peterson (2018), who rose to fame when Canada passed Bill C-16 requiring that trans individuals be addressed using the pronoun of their own choice. Peterson built a significant Alt-Right online following when he very publicly refused to do so arguing that legislating on language use was an infringement on freedom of expression (Independent Man, 2017; J. Peterson, n.d.). His lectures deploy Jung's psychological analytics to develop an account of individual responsibility directly counter-posed to the discourse of particular identity group vulnerability adopted by 'cultural liberalism'.

In this discourse resilience appears, both implicitly and explicitly, as an operational concept. This is in some ways the Alt-Right challenge to what Aradau and Huysmans (2018) call the assembly of credibility. The individual is enjoined to foster resilience through accepting weaknesses and sins. The religious elements of the US context clearly play a role here, but the broader pattern aligns closely with the dominant ideas associated with Neoliberalism. Individual productivity relies on responsibility, which in this case presupposes the ability to and normative value of, developing a thick skin to criticism and fighting Liberal gender norms. Framing anonymous extreme verbal abuse as a performance of the value of individual responsibility seems incoherent. However, for actors in the online Alt Right it appears to be widely accepted that pushing the boundaries of acceptable speech has the capacity to restructure wider cultural trends express the individual liberty of the troll from cultural Liberal ideology. Through trolling, actors like Milo Yiannopolous claimed to reveal the emptiness and fragility of the assumptions of 'snowflakes' who need their feelings protected in law while showing and performing resilience.

Resilience is, furthermore, a biological attribute. That is, the Alt-Right individual is racialized, but also gendered as a natural possessor of the value of resilience if it were not for cultural Liberalism. In sum, true white men are resilient online activists. The architectural assumption, therefore, is that fostering the protection of individuals from highly personal

attacks threatens the conditions for individual freedom, responsibility and natural selection. The paradoxical interpolation of a discourse of rising white male vulnerability, with a critique of the very concept of individual vulnerability when assigned to underprivileged groups, appears to be characteristic of Alt-Right thought. In this discourse, natural male resilience, when present, deserves survival and success against the artificial protection of women and minorities.

The meme below (Figure 1) exemplifies how these ideas come together with survivalist resilience as a core concept. On the one hand, it features natural white strength and resilience ('at this contest' for 'resources', 'conquest & exploration', 'stronger and smarter') enunciated as self-justifying natural law. At the same time, it is enacting an Alt-Right defence against claims that colonialism was negative or unjust, establishing discursive resilience against the historical revisionism of colonialism they call 'liberal guilt'.

[FIGURE 1 HERE]

FIGURE 1: A widely-shared Alt-Right meme. Source: 4Chan

At the same time and contradictorily, white men are under threat. Against resilient men lies a sense that an ideology of vulnerability centred on gender and identity underpins diversity activities that discriminate against men, thus making them vulnerable. This in turn necessitates further, personal-level, resilience. The open memo entitled 'Google's Ideological Echo Chamber' articulates this internal contradiction particular clearly. Written by a Google employee who was later fired and went on to become a regular media exponent of Alt right ideas, it critiques Google diversity practices for ignoring inherent differences between men and women, and more implicitly biological determinants of behaviours. It laments left bias, 'a politically correct monoculture that maintains it hold by shaming dissenters into silence'. The author views the Liberal ideological bias as focussing on 'affinity for those it sees as weak'. In such an 'ideological echo chamber' conservatives 'are a minority that feel like they need to stay in the closet to avoid open hostility'. As a response, in common with many examples, white men must call for more space for free expression of alternative opinions (Damore, 2017).

The racial and social (mostly gender-obsessed) resilience discourses of the Alt-Right are united by the appeal to natural Darwinian violence. For further examples, the Alt-Right's coverage of Meghan Markle's marriage to Prince Harry provides brutal instances of how the two come together in a gender-racial resilience discourse framed as: 'mystery meat woman, who is marrying into a family that is still a symbol of the racial and cultural identity of native British people', 'deadly for his family and all it represents' (Affirmative Right, 2018). This pseudo-biological conceptual architecture grounds culture, norms, and resilience to Liberalism as both a natural attribute and as an operational concept. That is, the alt-right discourse of resilience is not simply framed as a collective project underwritten by rejection of hegemonic ideological presumptions about resilience and vulnerability. It is also an individual project of rational liberation through fostering personal resilience in the face of hegemonic ideological assumptions. The individual is explicitly and implicitly enjoined to develop resilience to the experience of living as an outsider to the 'mainstream ideology'. Resilience thinking, framed as a Darwinian virtue and an operative mode of conflict, is the

crucial pin holding together racial ideologues with the 'gender ideology critics' of the online 'manosphere'.

Alt-right resilience to state, power, democracy

'their defeat will be, ultimately, a crushing one' (Infowars, n.d.).

What of democracy? In Alt-Right public discourses, a dominant cleavage is identified between libertarian and ethno-nationalist wings. They are unified by a critique of the hegemonic power of cultural Liberalism effected through 'cultural engineering', which is inflected with the tropes of resilience thinking. Various areas of tension arise between libertarian and ethno-nationalist populists, but they remain broadly united around Donald Trump. Amongst Bannon-like populist nationalists the collective resilience of the true nation is an important theme. Amongst libertarians, the critique of democracies is rooted in a rejection of PC mind control and desire to maintain individual resilience. We are firstly looking at discourses determining the subjectivity of truth, which determine believable and fake news (and therefore resilience to 'mainstream news'), and the related reliability of the democratic process.

The subjectivity and believability of news is a key facet of Alt-Right resilience thinking. It is, crucially, a condition of possibility for all the discourses here analysed, particularly concerning the democratic process. While easily parodied as paranoid conspiracy theorists, the Alt-Right cleavage of fake/real is governed by a powerful conceptual structure predicated on believability according to speaker. That is, truth-tellers framed as speaking on behalf of the nation, its 'real' identity –white America– and breaking hegemonic discursive limitations. This enunciative position is, crucially, maintained by powerful in-discourse norm-framing signals such as Trump's qualification of 'both sides' in reference to Charlottesville, his persistent references to Latino 'animals' and his border wall (whitehouse.gov, 2018). As with other nationalist discourses of truth, this is frequently defined against the lies propagated by identity traitors. Crucially, the Alt-Righter is encouraged to resist and develop resilience to these lies as with all Liberal thinking. Truth-teller validity can have remarkable durability once established. Trump achieved this during the election campaign, which explains how, despite the farcical incompetence of issuing 'alternative facts' from the White House, Trump is still believed by followers. This is a discursive perfect storm where information is invalidated by resilience to ideological difference and truth determined by affiliation to discursive radicalism.

Alt-Right discourses on democracy are the ultimate consequence of resilience to mainstream news and the politics they inform. The position is predicated on dissatisfaction with a system that has betrayed them and which, due to Liberal hegemony, is extremely unlikely to ever yield satisfactory results. Democracy is articulated as needing to be unpicked or reborn through return to a pre-Liberal value system centred on innate sources of resilience. The principle unifying claim is expressive of resilience thinking inasmuch as personal freedom is deemed to be placed at risk, or made vulnerable, by the same trends that weaken collective resilience: the power of hegemonic cultural Liberal ideas. The

individual response is thus simultaneously an element in a collective political response (see Bokhari & Yiannopoulos, 2016 and subreddits [r/EndDemocracy](#) and [/r/DebateAltRight/](#)).

This decentralised and highly individualised political agency has deep roots. Amongst far-right violent extremists dedicated to overthrowing the state, resilience has long been part of the decentralised strategy of resistance to power of the federal government –or potential for resistance to be precise, as exemplified by *Infowars'* gun rights discourse. It is therefore critically important to locate the seeds of a non-Liberal pattern of politics that revolves around concepts of vulnerability, persistence, adaptation, and which may be effectively parsed as a form of resilience thinking. As noted by the ideological godfather of far-right lone wolf actions, the atomic decentralised revolutionary is effective because: 'anti-state, political organizations utilizing [pyramidal] command and control are easy prey for government infiltration, entrapment, and destruction of the personnel involved. This has been seen repeatedly in the United States' (Beam, 1992).

When considered in relation to references to Trump as the 'useful politician' apparent in most Alt-Right publications, the instructions and exhortations to insurgency suggests that the discursive scope of reactionary resilience runs deeper than electoral success or failure. It carries a broadly coherent critique of the present as ideologically tyrannical, which is genuinely appealing to core disaffected white male audiences. In framing the problem as one of eroded resilience, it is likely that we are seeing fabric that may be rewoven into direct action, should electoral politics prove ineffective. Reading about Alt-Right ideas of revolution, insurgency and anti-Liberal resistance reveals the separation between Alt-Right discourses of resilience and resistance. The former is what is to be done now, it is the natural quality of whites and a personal ethos of preparing the conditions for their politics and supporters to survive intact. This is in turn a crucial condition for resistance and the other direct actions necessary for the reconstruction of the world.

Given the presence of a range of explicitly anti-democratic discourses on the Alt Right, this should give us particular pause. Across the online Alt Right, social decay, calling up counter strategies to adapt, is attached to the *integral* failures of Liberal Democracy. The answer is to return to premodern traditional principles. To acknowledge the inherently mythic nature of democracy, an objective reality which is suppressed only by the constant effort of a dedicated 'media-industrial complex', leads authors to advocate a surrender of the management of society to those *who already control the actual levers of power*. Nick Land suggests that neoreactionaries advocate the form of a sovereign 'neocameralist,' authoritarian governance. In such a system, the state becomes a corporation, legitimised by technocratic efficacy in delivering value to its shareholders. Land suggests that the closest contemporary examples of illiberal but stable, prosperous and effective states like Hong Kong or Singapore. Democracy is defined as a 'parasite' which has transformed 'local, painfully dysfunctional, intolerable, and thus urgently corrected behaviour patterns into global, numbed, and chronic socio-political pathologies', its death is judged to be an inevitable consequence of its globalisation (Land, 2012).

It is easy to see how a populist authoritarian claiming to be 'too rich to be bribed', constitutes a possible 'escape route' for the Alt Right. Conversely, given the manner in which resilience thinking operates in their discourses, it is likely that future electoral failure

will not ensure decline in these movements. The inherent trend to degeneration that the Alt-Right identifies with Liberal modernity fuels the pursuit of resilience to the Liberal ideology of modernity, rights and democracy, reconstituting the reactionary political aesthetic of tradition as the means to popular mobilisation. The 'Dark Enlightenment' is but one Alt-Right solution to the problem of democracy –others include a return to masculine warrior tribes, fascism, anarchy or racial states– but all cohere around the need to resist Liberal democracy. Inurement to the mythos of democracy as corrosive for 'self-reliance, industry and self organisation' reveals the presence of resilience in accounts of the value of ethno-cultural authenticity in Alt right discourse.

In sum, resilience is a key Alt-Right individual norm as well as an operational practice. Specifically, their call to resilience entails resisting any liberal shift in norms and the information (news) that supports such a shift. Infowars' Alex Jones, for example, practices and encourages this resilience by refuting that any of the recent school shootings has taken place (Particularly Sandy Hook, see infowars.com), accusing the government of staging the attack, including actors playing bereaved families, so as to take guns away from Americans. This also reveals the core mechanism at play: enact native resilience to false information supporting normative shift ('the scientifically engineered lies of the globalists'), which in turn is needed for the separate –and equally mythical– act of resistance against liberal forces, and 'their ultimate goal of enslaving humanity' ("About Alex Jones," n.d.). To be able to think against modernity is precisely to make possible the Evolan rescue of humanity from amidst its ruins. This formulation of a reactionary resilience proffers a purified subject whose strategic adoption of resilience is simultaneously archaic and futurist. Its operationalisation creates very real resilience to ideas, arguments and even information.

Conclusion: 'natural' and operational resilience

Is there any such thing as 'reactionary resilience'? We have argued that the circulation of resilience thinking on the alt right suggests that there is. We have explored how resilience is woven in and through Alt-Right thinking on indigeneity, race, gender, norms, politics and even truth. Discourses of white indigeneity bear enough similarities to broader accounts of resilient indigeneity that one can make the case for the Alt right as a discourse of resilience. Closely related discourses of individual liberation from Liberal cultural and political ideology express correlate project of resilience to ideological programming at the personal level.

Further, due to their grounding of most categories on biological identity, Alt-Right discourses *double* resilience: as both a 'natural' attribute and as an operational precept. Resilience is clearly separated from resistance in Alt-Right discourse. Resilience is framed as the immediate condition of possibility for any later resistance to be possible, which means that we are looking at resilience as a key condition of possibility for resistance. Alt-Right resilience is the natural quality and operational strategy that, if embraced and operationalised, can protect the conditions (knowing the truth and rejecting lies, racial purity, possession of firearms, reproduction of whites) necessary for resistance (voting Trump, overthrowing liberals, revolution if necessary) against hegemonic Liberalism and its transformation of society.

In discourses of indigeneity, resilience appears firstly as an evolutionary attribute of white men, which, secondly, must yet be protected. This idea of racial resilience establishes the radical objective of total segregation due to the recessive genetics of white phenotype attributes (which are, contradictorily, not resilient). In discourses of culture, resilience is the necessary 'natural' attribute of the strong. *Resilience* from Liberal hegemony is also, however, a demonstration of an individual's commitment as part of an operational strategy. Believing that resilience is both a natural attribute and a necessary operationalisation is a contradiction that only makes sense where resilience to Liberalism allows for a recovering of the political subject from the brink of disaster (Evans & Reid, 2013) which is, crucially, a *precursor* to full salvation. In politics and democracy, Alt-Right resilience is also double: on the one hand resilience from Liberal ideas and the truth of others (grounded on identity, in turn predicated on nature), and on the other resilience to corrosive decadent democracy. Finally, it is worth highlighting that the Alt-Right's grounding in resilience thinking provides some cause for concern. Alt-Right resilience thinking fosters forms of decentralised and networked subjectivity and counter-information as a precursor to any (also decentralised and networked) direct forms of resistance. In light of the prevalence of this discursive mode, it is very likely that the Alt-Right will prove itself to be highly resilient to the travails (and any negative coverage) of the Trump presidency. This reactionary discourse of resilience may all too easily, as it has in the past, find violent expression should it experience a likely interruption to its recent electoral successes.

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